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SACRAMENTO WOMAN CONVICTED FOR FRAUDULENT RECEIPT OF HURRICANE KATRINA DISASTER RELIEF MONEY

SACRAMENTO--United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced that TONYA V. MEREDITH, 21, of Sacramento, pled guilty today before United States District Court Judge Frank C. Damrell to three felony offenses related to her theft of Hurricane Katrina disaster relief money by fraud.

This case was investigated by the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General, and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service.

In September 2005, Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales created the Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force, designed to deter, investigate, and prosecute disaster-related federal crimes such as charity fraud, identity theft, procurement fraud, and insurance fraud. The Hurricane Katrina Fraud Task Force-chaired by Assistant Attorney General Alice S. Fisher of the Criminal Division-includes the FBI, the U.S. Inspectors General community, the U.S. Secret Service, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the Executive Office for U.S. Attorneys, and others.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Michelle Rodriguez, who is prosecuting the case, MEREDITH pled guilty to theft of U.S. money earmarked for Hurricane Katrina disaster victims, to making false claims to a U.S. agency, and to making a false statement to obtain Hurricane Katrina emergency housing relief. In her plea, MEREDITH admitted that she stole over \$10,000 of funds allocated for disaster relief for victims of Hurricane Katrina. MEREDITH signed documents certifying false information to FEMA, (the Federal Emergency Management Agency). In fact, at the time of Hurricane Katrina, MEREDITH was a California resident, and she admitted that she merely made up a New Orleans residence address in order to qualify for additional aid.

MEREDITH is scheduled to be sentenced on February 26, 2007. The maximum penalty she faces is 20 years imprisonment, restitution, and a fine of up to \$250,000. MEREDITH also will receive a 3-year term of federal supervised release. However, the actual sentence will be determined at the discretion of the court after consideration of the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, which take into account a number of variables, and any applicable statutory sentencing factors.

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